Building a Useful Continuity Book

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INTRODUCTION

Any soldier who has taken over a new duty position or additional duty knows the value of a good continuity book. It can provide a wealth of information to him including points of contact, duties and responsibilities, information on how to accomplish common tasks, and personnel and equipment data. Without it, a soldier is often forced to relearn the very same lessons and information that his predecessor discovered during his time in the position. In today's downsizing Army, this waste of time is unacceptable. Every soldier must take positive steps to increase efficiency. Yet, few departing soldiers make the effort to leave a good continuity book for their replacements. As a result, only a few fortunate individuals have been lucky enough to receive these treasured items from their predecessors. Just think of your own experiences – how often have you inherited a useful continuity book and, perhaps more importantly, how often have you left one for your replacement?

Everyone can come up with excuses why they cannot produce a good continuity book. Some will complain that they are too busy with other duties to devote their precious time to something that will not benefit them. Others believe that it's a waste of time because nobody really uses a continuity book anyway. And still others may state that they don't know what a good continuity book looks like. The purpose of this article is to provide a technique for preparing a continuity book that will be beneficial to the soldier preparing it and useful to the replacement soldier and unit. If done correctly, the author will profit not only in developing an invaluable tool for himself and his replacement, but in building greater knowledge about his job. The article will identify some relevant information that should be included in a continuity book. The reader can then identify and include additional sections as appropriate for his particular duty position.

DEFINITION

One of the reasons why a good continuity book may be so hard to assemble is that U.S. Army publications do not mention it at all. In fact, no Department of Defense definition exists for the term "continuity book." In order to share a common understanding of the term, this article defines continuity book as a reference document produced by an individual to share relevant information concerning a duty or position on which he/she has knowledge. It is normally produced for an individual assigned to take over that duty or position, such as a replacement NCO designated to substitute a departing squad leader. If a soldier has more than one duty, he/she should have several continuity books. For example, a squad leader who is also the Crime Prevention NCO and communications security (COMSEC) custodian should have a continuity book for each of the three duties. One of the key parts of the definition that this article will cover more closely is what relevant information should be included in the continuity book; that is, what type of information should be left for the replacement soldier.

TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES

The individual preparing the continuity book should keep several things in mind during its development:

•Start Now and Keep Revising It. The continuity book should not be put together the week before the replacement takes over. In fact, the departing soldier should begin assembling it when he first assumes his position. This will allow him to begin recording continuity information during his time in that position and will ensure that the data in the book is accurate and detailed. Moreover, the developmental process involved in putting together the document will greatly increase the author's own familiarity with his duty position.

•Use It Daily. The author should assemble the book with an eye to making it relevant and useful for himself. He will know he has achieved this when he refers to it to accomplish routine activities. This technique has two advantages. First and foremost, the soldier developing the document can use it as a handy reference. A second advantage, one that is important to both the unit and the replacement soldier, is that the book is tested by the author on a daily basis for relevance and usefulness.

•Make the Continuity Book One of the Goals and Objectives in the Author's NCOER Checklist or OER Support Form. A soldier and the soldier's rater should agree on the importance of developing the document during the rating period. This ensures that the author is both afforded the time and given the credit for producing it.

•Make the Document Revision-Friendly. With the current ease of accessibility to computers in both the workplace and at home, soldiers should assemble information for the continuity book using computers. This allows the author to quickly update old information. Additionally, he/she can save the data on computer disks. This allows a replacement to further revise and update the information to pass on to future replacements. However, remember to save the data in a manner which allows the replacement soldier to access it. Normally, the optimal method of doing this is to save it on a computer disk using a software program (pay attention to the version) that the replacement can access using the computer at the unit.

In undertaking the task of constructing a continuity book, the author must decide what relevant information he/she should include in the book. Of greatest importance, the book should include information that cannot be found anywhere else, such as standing operating procedures (SOPs) and policy letters. The author also wants to ensure that successful techniques in accomplishing key tasks are listed and shared with the replacement soldier. Some useful sections of a continuity book are listed below:

•Table of Contents - This page should be at the very beginning of the document to give the reader a quick reference to all the information contained within the book. Of course, the author should complete this section only after he has put together the rest of the continuity book.

•Duty Appointment Orders - These orders often state the references that the appointed individual will use to carry out his duties. Normally, the unit adjutant or company executive officer, in the case of a company-level duty appointment, publishes the appointment orders.

•References - This section lists the publications that the author found useful in effectively performing his job. For some positions, such as additional duties, the number of references may be few. However, for positions such as company commander, the list of references could be lengthy. In this case, the departing

officer should list only the references that he believes is especially useful. In any event, the replacement can use the reference guide as a reading list to learn the specifics of his duties and responsibilities.

•Duties and Responsibilities - The author should provide a job description of the duty position. If applicable, he can enclose a copy of his Officer Evaluation Report Support Form (DA 67-9) with Part IV (Rated Officer significant duties and responsibilities and major performance objectives) completed or Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER) (DA 2166-7) with Part III (Duty Description) filled out.

•Mission Statement - The continuity book should contain the unit's mission statement, as well of those of the next two higher headquarters. This provides the replacement a reference on how his new job fits into the overall success of the unit mission.

•Mission Essential Task List (METL) - The departing soldier should list the collective tasks of his section and how they support his higher echelon's METL.

•Common Tasks - This is one of the key sections of the continuity book. It provides step-by-step instruction on how to accomplish key common tasks for that duty position. This can be done with worded instructions or through pictures and diagrams, such as flow charts. If the steps are already listed in unit standing operations procedures (SOP), simply refer to the appropriate section of the document. If paperwork must be filled out as part of common tasks, the author should enclose properly completed examples of them.

•Alert Roster - The continuity document should provide an up-to-date telephonic alert roster with instructions on when and how to use it. The author should ensure that this document is kept updated in his book.

•Organizational Phone Roster - Unit S-1s or Signal Officers (SIGOs) normally keep a current unit telephone roster. This roster will provide the replacement with a quick guide to the phone numbers in the unit.

•Important Phone Numbers - These are the telephone numbers that the author has found particularly useful during his time in the position. These can be numbers within the organization, but are more often numbers that are outside of it.

•Map of the Installation/Training Area - This is an excellent aid in orienting the replacement soldier to the sites and areas that he/she must become familiar with to be successful in the new assignment.

•Equipment Listing - The departing soldier lists the key pieces of equipment that his replacement will be responsible for, such as weapons, vehicles, and communications equipment (shoot, move and communicate), along with a capabilities reference guide for each type of equipment.

•Maintenance Status of Key Pieces of Equipment - The author should provide a snapshot of the operability of each item listed in the equipment listing. The author should also maintain a current deadline report for all non-mission capable equipment in his unit and list the actions being taken to correct the problems.

•Battle Rhythm Chart - This chart shows the normal recurring events in the unit that the author attended, such as training meetings, leader meetings, and staff meetings. Also include the non-mandatory meetings the replacement soldier should attend.

•Published Training Schedules - The author should enclose a schedule of upcoming near-term training events to orient the replacement soldier to the flow of activities in the unit.

•Long-Range Calendar of Events - The continuity book should contain this calendar to highlight upcoming events throughout the year to the replacement. This affords him the opportunity to start planning for future activities.

•Personnel Data Information - Provide data on the personnel in the unit. The information should include name, rank, social security number, military occupational specialty (MOS), duty position, address, telephone number, spouse name, and children names. Also include deployment readiness information that shows which individuals within the unit are not deployable and the reasons why.

•Recent Inspection and Evaluation Results - Provide copies of the inspection and evaluation results so that the replacement can assess the unit's strengths and weaknesses. These include results from the Command Inspection Program (CIP), external evaluation (EXEVAL), and Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP). When available, the author should enclose inspection and evaluation checklists that provide the tasks, conditions, and standards for his areas of responsibility. The incoming replacement will find this to be an invaluable resource.

•Leader Book Information - The author of the continuity book should also include leader book information in his continuity book. A leader book is a tool to help leaders identify and train essential soldier tasks that support the unit's mission essential collective tasks. Leaders use this book to record information addressing administrative data, common tasks, skill qualification assessment, and specific collective tasks that support the unit's METL. They also record personal information that affects their soldiers' training performance and that leaders need to know to provide training which meets their soldiers' personal needs. The size of the leader book can vary depending on the leader and his duties; i.e., the book for a company commander may be much larger than that of a team leader. As a result, depending on the amount of information, the soldier preparing the continuity book should include leader book information if it fits. Otherwise, he/she may decide to keep the leader book as a separate document.

•Lessons Learned - This section highlights the lessons the departing soldier learned while carrying out his duties. It should include tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) which the author found useful in producing optimal results in a given task. In essence, this is an after-action review (AAR) of potential pitfalls with tips on how to overcome them.

•Summary of Ongoing Actions - The departing soldier should prepare this key section of the continuity book just before the author is due to depart the position. The author should sum up key ongoing operations in enough detail for his replacement to successfully carry out all remaining actions.

In no way is this article's list of relevant information meant to be exhaustive. After all, every job in the Army has its own intricacies and details. The listing simply provides a point of departure for the reader to use in assembling his own continuity book. He/she may decide to leave off some of the recommended sections or add extra ones not mentioned in this article. The most important consideration that the soldier should use in deciding what topics to include is usefulness to the replacement soldier in assuming his new duties and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. Army is smaller now than it has been in decades. To maintain our sharp cutting edge, we have to find ways to become more efficient in every facet of our operations. Without a doubt, a good continuity book can help greatly in boosting the productivity of the Army by reducing the amount of time that new personnel spend in learning their new jobs. This allows replacement soldiers to more quickly learn their new jobs and thus integrate into their units. As a direct by-product of the more rapid integration of new soldiers, the negative effects of personnel turnover to unit readiness can be greatly minimized. Additionally, a continuity book assembled early in the author's assignment assists in learning the new job more thoroughly and will become an invaluable resource. Lastly, a helpful continuity book reflects well on its author because it shows that he/she is concerned with more than just the accomplishment of his mission, but that he/she is planning for the unit's success even in the author's absence. So don't make excuses--instead, start working on your continuity book.